Select Miscellany.

THE GUEST.

O thou Guest, so long delayed,
Surely, when the house was made,
In its chambers, wide and free,
There was set a place for thee.
Surely in some room was spread
For thy sake a snowy bed,
Decked with linen white and fine,
Meet, O Guest, for use of thine.

Yet thou hast not kept the tryst,
Other guests our lips have kissed;
Other guests have tarried long,
Moved by sunshine and by song;
For the year was bright with May,
All the birds kept holiday,
All the skies were clear and blue,
When this house of ours was new.

Youth came in with us to dwell,
Crowned with rose and asphodel,
Lingered long and even yet
Can not quite his haunts forget.
Love hath sat beside our board,
Brought us treasures from his hoard,
Brimmed our cups with fragrant wine,
Vintage of the hills divine.

Down our garden path has strayed
Young Romance, in light arrayed;
Joy hath flung her garlands wide;
Faith sung low at eventide;
Care hath flitted in and out;
Sorrow strewn her weeds about;
Hope held up her torch on high
When clouds darkened all the sky.

Pain with pallid lips and thin,
Oft hath slept our house within;
Life hath called us, loud and long,
With a voice as trumpet strong.
Sometimes we have thought, O Guest,
Thou wert coming with the rest,
Watched to see thy shadow fall
On the inner chamber wall.

For we know that, soon or late,
Thou wilt enter at the gate,
Cross the threshold, pass the door,
Glide at will from floor to floor.
When thou comest, by this sign
We shall know thee, Guest divine:
Though alone thy coming be,
Some one must go forth with thee.

—*Mrs. J. C. R. Dorr, in Harper's for December.*

Our Winter in the Country.

The schools were to open on the first Wednesday in September, and by the middle of August we bagan regretfully to realize that it was time to be thinking of getting back to town.

"It is a great mistake having the schools open so early," said Jonas. "September in the city is often the warmest as well as the sickliest month in the year; yet the children are hurried in from the mountains and seashore, and crowded into close, ill-ventilated school-rooms at a time when in the country nature is putting on its gayest colors and the air is the most healthful and invigorating. And, as if it were not enough to incarcerate them during school hours, so many lessons are imposed to be studied at home that scarcely a moment is left to devote to recreation. As a natural sequence, by the time the winter fairly sets in, all the good effected by the summer's rusticating is neutralized, leaving them an easy prey to diphtheria, malaria, and a host of other evils."

Tom and Ben exchanged significant glances at the end of this philippic, and when Annie, who, being a Vassar graduate, feels a fine indifference to the lesser schools, ventured to propose our remaining another month in the country, they enthusiastically seconded the motion.

"But we shall all fall behind in our classes," protested Bell.

"And fail of promotion," added Beth.

"Oh, but we'll stay at home, and sister Nan can hear us recite," said Tom.

"We'd learn a good deal faster than we learn in school, if she would," said Ben, looking coaxingly at Annie.

"I'll hear you willingly, if you will promise to show me proper respect," said Annie, with a laugh.

It would be hard to enumerate all the arguments that were urged in favor of our staying. Even Bell and Beth withdrew their protest and declared themselves willing to take their chances for the next promotion; and as Jonas tacitly abetted them in this temporary revolt against the school authorities, it was useless for me to raise an objection. In fact, I had no wish to raise one; if Jonas thought that October would be early enough for the children to enter school, that settled the question; for myself, I felt in no haste whatever to return to town.

Only those who have spent an autumn in the country can fully sympathize in our enjoyment of those rare September days—days which the summer in all its glory could never duplicate; days when over the woods and hills hung a shimmering purple haze, and the blue waters stretched motionless as a mirror under the dreamy skies. For the next three or four weeks we literally took "no thought for the morrow," giving ourselves up physically and mentally to the delicious idleness which nothing but the soft Italian *dolce far niente* can adequately describe.

"To think of being shut up in school on days like these!" said Bell, as we drifted about the bay in the hazy sunshine, or jogged along roads that seemed cut through quarries of rainbows, the woods on either hand being like the walls of the New Jerusalem in the splendor of their coloring. It was an entirely new experience to the children, none of them having ever before seen the country in autumn; and as we witnessed their delight we had the feeling, Jonas and I, that in keeping them so large a part of the year in the city we had in a certain way defrauded them.

"Only one week more!" sighed Beth, as September drew to a close; but that very day Jonas received a letter from a well-known publishing house asking him to take in hand the translation of "The Life and Letters of the Great German Scientist, Professor Karl Von Steuklenberg." It was a work that would occupy him some three or four months and bring him in a good round sum.

"If we were going to be here all winter, I should not hesitate a moment," he said, as he closed the letter; "but they want it to be ready for publication by the first of March, and in the city there are so many interruptions." He took up another letter as he spoke, and opened it in a preoccupied way. It proved to be from his brother, who, with his wife and mother-in-law, had been occupying our house during our absence.

"They have all been sick, and he begs that, if possible, we will let them keep the house another month, as the old lady is not yet well enough to be moved."

Jonas is usually very ready to sympathize with his friends when trouble overtakes them, but in the present instance his voice showed no regret.

"I only wish they'd take it for the winter," he said, as he passed the letter across the table.

"And what would become of us, in that case?" I asked, in a startled voice.

"We'd stay here, of course," answered Jonas, coolly.

"But the children, Jonas!" I exclaimed. "Think what a set-back it would be to them, having to be out of school all winter!"

"Not necessarily a set-back, my dear. They have done well thus far; why not let Annie continue to teach them? It is excellent discipline for her."

Annie looked disappointed. It was to have been her first winter in society, and she had anticipated it with girlish eagerness. But when her father spoke of the advantage the proposed arrangement would be to him in his work, and hinted at a necessity for retrenchments, she yielded at once, with her usual "sweet reasonableness;" and the younger ones were too well pleased with the novel prospect of a winter in the country to think of raising an objection. For myself, I must confess that, though I tried to give my consent cheerfully, I was somewhat appalled at the outlook, for in my youth I had spent several winters in an old New England farmhouse, and well remembered how drearily the time went by. Still, in looking back, I could see that the dreariness was due to the people themselves rather than to the place and season, and I mentally resolved to profit by the experience.

"It is a tentative undertaking," said Jonas, "and very likely we may all be sick of it before the winter is half over; but if we can manage to keep busy, I hardly think we shall find the time hanging heavy."

Busy! Tom and Ben exchanged one of their telegraphic glances—hadn't they enough planned to keep them busy for the next three months, at least, if only the weather held fair?

But before a week passed, the weather, as if to show us what was in store for us, took a sudden turn; the skies darkened, an easterly wind set in, and day and night we could hear the thud of the breakers on the Bridgehampton beach. By the third day these premonitory symptoms had culminated in a raging storm; and then came the problem—how shall we make sunshine indoor when the outer world is gray and cheerless? Fortunately, our Annie is something of a heliostat, holding a store of sunshine in reserve for just such days; and though she kept the children rigidly to their lessons during the appointed study hours, she was as ready as the children themselves for any merry-making the moment study hours were over. To see her filling the role of teacher, or sitting at her father's elbow, patiently giving him the benefit of her German in translating Professor Karl von Steuklenberg's prosaic letters, one would scarcely have believed that this clear-eyed, practical-looking young person could enter so heartily into the juvenile pastimes of her brothers and sisters. To us, who knew how great was the disappointment she was bearing so bravely, her sunniness was a daily wonder; and, thoroughly as we had sympathized with her, we began to feel that the discipline of the winter was in some ways more than compensating her for the loss of a season in society.

One of the conveniences of our farmhouse was a spacious attic; here we established a gymnasium, and on days when the weather was such as to keep us indoors we usually spent an hour or two with the bean-bags and dumb-bells, making a sort of family frolic of it. We had feared that the place would be too cool for comfort, but we found that, with the vigorous exercise, a fire would have been unendurable. A box of tools and a scroll-saw furnished additional entertainment for bad weather; a small room, opening from the kitchen, that during the summer had been used as a laundry, serving for a workshop.

But the weather had to be at its worst to keep Jonas and the boys indoors for more than half a day at a time.

"Why be afraid of a dash of rain or a puff of cold air?" said Jonas, one morning, when I expressed the opinion that the day was not very propitious for a tramp. "If we accustom ourselves to the changes in the weather, we shall be less likely to suffer from them. It is not to be wondered at that the people who breathe the overheated atmosphere of most of our dwelling-houses, stores, and offices shiver at the thought of facing a respectable breeze; no wonder they have sore throats and pneumonia and consumption. The only wonder is that any of them survive the winter. But this house is in no danger of being overheated, and I am glad of it."

No! though Annie and I had that very morning been listing all the doors, it was not likely to be overheated. We had not realized, until the November winds began to rampage, how many cracks and crevices there were in the old house; but no one seemed to suffer any ill effects from this free ventilation. On the contrary, I think we were never more exempt from colds and headaches. Still, our exemption in this respect was no doubt partly due to our frequent walks; for, except when the weather was such as to make walking out of question, Jonas insisted that the girls and I were not to be left at home when he and the boys started out for a constitutional. Beth, who, on a cold day, likes nothing better than to snuggle up to the fire with a pleasant book for company, was sometimes disposed to object to this arrangement; she could see no use in being dragged out, rain or shine; but, if there was no alternative, why not ride?

"Because, my dear," said Jonas, "in cold weather, as a rule, people ought never to ride when they are able to walk. Carriage-riding, at the best, is an indolent way of taking the air, and in winter one wants not only air, but action. There is nothing like a good brisk walk to set the blood in motion.

There were days when I, too, was inclined to protest; the country was so uninviting at this season of the year, and it was such a trouble to put on one's wraps just for a little walk! But, the habit once formed, I began to find that without my walk the day was sadly incomplete. And I had never imagined that a winter landscape could possess so many attractions—the marvellous tracery of leafless limbs and twigs against the wintry sky, the stormy tournaments of the clouds, the tiny patches of green grass laughing through the snow. Every day had its surprisal. I remember one day in particular; there had been a light shower the night before, followed with a flurry of snow, and when we started out, a cold, gray sky bent over a cold and dismal world; but just as we reached the woods the sun burst forth, and instantly all was changed: the trees stood white and glistening, every branch and twig covered with feathery foliage, while here and there a wild grape-vine hung in snowy festoons. And as we came out on the other side of the bit of woodland, there lay the blue bay dimpling in the sunshine. It was like standing in some cool, white grotto looking out on a summer sea.

And this enjoyment of the beautiful was not the only good that I derived from my winter walks; as the weeks grew into months, I found, to my surprise, that I was freer than I had been for years from the attacks of my former winter foes—neuralgia and dyspepsia.

"I told you so," said Jonas, with that assumption of superior foresight so natural to a man. "There are thousands of women throughout the country to-day dosing down tonics, and imagining themselves to be confirmed invalids, who, if they could be persuaded to take an hour's exercise every morning in the open air, would soon be able to laugh at the doctors. But half of them would think any doctor demented who dared to propose such a remedy."

"Yet, as a rule," said I, "city women, I am inclined to think, do more walking than women in the country."

"And the reason, my dear, is obvious," said Jonas, with exasperating urbanity. "Broadway and Fourteenth street naturally offer greater attractions to the feminine mind than winter woods and fields. Our neighbor, Mrs. Tompkins, would willingly walk from the ferry to Macy's for the sake of looking in at the shop windows, but she would hold up her hands in horror if some fine morning you should ask her to go with you to the woods. Just try it and see."

I was very much afraid that the event would prove him a true prophet, but I determined to make the experiment. Usually we took our outing in the early part of the day, Jonas being of the opinion that the morning rays of the sun possess greater virtue than those of the afternoon; but the next morning so much time was consumed in deciphering one of Professor Von Steuklenberg's hieroglyphical manuscripts that we decided not to start until after dinner. Secretly, I was rather thankful to the old professor, feeling that the delay increased the chance of my success with Mrs. Tompkins; and, as the sun was shining enticingly, it was in quite a sanguine mood that Annie and I (Jonas having gone on in advance with the youngsters) knocked at the farmhouse door. We found Mrs. Tompkins and her daughter in a close, overheated sitting-room, busily engaged in cutting carpet-rags.

Walk! There was a look of undisguised amazement on Mrs. Tompkins' face—a face that would have been comely but for the sallowness of the complexion.

"Well, now, the truth is," she began, after thanking us for the invitation, "we have so much to do indoors, Ruth and me, that we get about all the walkin' we want. Then, havin' a houseful o' boarders all summer, the sewin' gets so behind that it takes us all winter to catch up. We've been waitin' six months or more for a chance to get at these rags, an' I told Ruth that if we didn't make a beginnin' pretty soon the dinin'-room 'd have to go bare floor next season; so this mornin' we got a real early start with the work, an' here we be."

"Oh, let the rags wait, Mrs. Tompkins," urged Annie; "it is too pleasant to stay indoors to-day."

Ruth, a delicate-featured girl with a general air of being overworked, looked up wistfully; but Mrs. Tompkin's eyes were fixed on the strip of yellow calico that she was cutting.

"That ain't my way," said she, with an energetic snip of her shears; "when there's work to do, I do it, whether the sun shines or not."

"Now, Mrs. Tompkins," said Annie, catching the look in Ruth's eyes, "if you will let Ruth go with us to-day, we'll all come to-morrow afternoon and help with the carpet-rags."

"Why, you're real clever," said Mrs. Tompkins, her face brightening. "Ruth can go, of course, if she likes, but for my part I'd a good deal rather stay in the house on a day like this."

Ruth, without waiting for further permission, hastily tumbled the rags from her lap, and ran to put on her wraps.

"How pleasant this is!" she exclaimed, as soon as we were in the open air. "It is so tiresome staying in the house all day! It makes me dread to have winter come."

"But why stay indoors so closely?" I asked.

"Oh, there's always something to be done," Ruth answered, in a discouraged voice; "and mother never seems to think it worth while for any one to start out just for the sake of walking. It wouldn't be quite so bad if we had more books," she added, regretfully. Annie took a hint from that remark, and the next day, when we went to fulfill our promise, she carried with her three or four late magazines. Ruth's eyes widened at the sight of them, and the hungry way in which she turned the leaves gave Annie another hint. There were five or six farmers' families within a half-mile's radius of us, and, knowing that there were but few books in the neighborhood, Annie proposed forming a reading club.

"It's all nonsense, Nan," said Bell, "and it will be perfectly stupid for us. They'll come, of course, if they think they are going to have a good time, but they wont care a straw for the reading."

"Wait and see," said Annie, as she summed up the names of those who were to be invited. At first none but the young people were asked, but before three meetings had been held it began to be hinted that some of the fathers and mothers would like to join the club.

"Let them come, by all means," said Jonas, who on club night was always ready to forego the society of Professor Karl Von Steuklenberg and lend himself to the entertainment of our guests; "it will do the young folks good to have them here." As the result of this extended invitation the attendance was speedily doubled; even Mrs. Tompkins was persuaded to leave her carpet-rags for one evening in the week; and before the winter was half over "the club" had become the central interest of the nighborhood.

"The chief objection to living on a farm in winter," said Jonas to one of our farmer friends, "is the lack of society, and for that reason every neighborhood ought to have something going on to draw the people together socially at least once a week."

"You're right there, Mr. Brownin'," was the answer; "it's the lonesomeness of the winters on the farm that sets our boys and girls against farm-life and drives so many of 'em away from home. This club is a godsend to us, and I dread to think of its coming to an end."

"But why let it come to an end, Mr. Sanders?" asked Jonas.

"Well, for one thing, when you go away there won't be books enough among us, all told, at least not the right sort of books, to keep up the interest."

"That is easily remedied," said Jonas. "Now, what I would propose is this, that another winter the club should meet from house to house, and that a sufficient sum should be paid by the members to subscribe for two or three magazines, the family at whose house the meeting is held retaining the magazines until the next club night, thus giving all an opportunity to read them. Possibly the membership fee would admit of the purchase of a new book now and then, and these would form the nucleus of what might in time become a circulating library."

"Yes, that's a sensible plan," said our neighbor, slowly; "but what I'd like to see established is an old-fashioned lyceum. We used to have 'em when I was a boy, and I can count up more'n half a dozen prominent public men who did their first speaking in the lyceum in the old red school-house."

"Oh, there's nothing like it for bringing out the boys," said Jonas, with enthusiasm. "I'd like to see one established in every neighborhood. I had not thought of it before, but I don't see why we can't combine one with the reading club, devoting an evening once a fortnight to a debate."

Mr. Sanders so heartily approved of this proposition that at the next meeting it was laid before the members.

"Must the girls debate as well as the boys?" asked Ruth Tompkins, timidly.

"It is not compulsory, but I haven't the slightest doubt that they would be able to hold their own," said Jonas, smiling maliciously. Then up spoke Tom.

"I move that we have a paper, and all who don't care to speak will have to write something."

The family smiled furtively at this, knowing that Tom considered declamation his forte; but the motion was forthwith seconded and carried. It was astonishing to see the energy with which the young people entered on this "new departure;" and it was equally astonishing to see what undreamed-of talent was developed. Our own girls and boys, though they had never manifested any relish for writing compositions, took a genuine pride in the club paper, contributing to every number, without the slightest urging, a squib, a story, or a bit of rhyme, and even venturing occasionally to try their hand at an essay or a review.

"It is altogether different from writing compositions," said Bell, who had frankly confessed to Annie that she found the meetings far from stupid.

But the club was not their only recreation. Within a few moment's walk of the house was a small pond that afforded excellent skating, and often on still nights the boys would build a fire on the bank, and, pitching a tent near by for the comfort of those who did not care to trust themselves to the glassy surface of the pond, hold a sort of skating carnival. Now and then we received and accepted an invitation to an apple-paring or a quilting-bee, and not infrequently an evening was devoted to popping corn and pulling candy.

"I want the children to feel," said Jonas, who always entered into these sports as heartily as any of the younger ones, "that life may be just as enjoyable in the country as in the city; and I want them to be able also to enjoy the simple pleasures of life."

"I think the country is jolly in winter," said Ben. "You can't have half as much fun in the city coasting and skating."

"But we have missed all the concerts and lectures and parties," said Annie, regretfully.

"But all those things will keep, little woman, and be just as good another year," said Jonas, patting her head; "even better perhaps, for, as an old elder, who sometimes preached for us when I was a boy, had a habit of saying, 'Hope deferred maketh the realization more sweeter.'"

"Oh, I am not complaining," said Annie, brightly. "I have really enjoyed the winter; and the time has gone so rapidly that it hardly seems possible that to-day is the first of March."

"Well, I think, on the whole," said Jonas, as he numbered the last page of "The Life and Letters of Professor Karl Von Steuklenberg, "we shall all have to admit that our winter in the country has been no loss to us."—*Marian Breck, in Christian Union.*

Inroad of the Barbarians.

This is the light in which Mary Clemmer, the versatile and brilliant Washington correspondent of *The Independent*, views the assembling of congress: "Congress day, like the Queen's weather, is almost sure to be fine; and last Monday did not fail to come up to its standard of azure and gold and delicious atmosphere, full of the scent of late roses and still lingering chrysanthemums. It was more than a sentimental sigh one gave in passing from God's bright weather into the Capitol, to see at once that the beautiful corridors given to cleanliness and silence for the last nine long months had in one brief hour been seized by the Philistines and besmeared and defiled by the tobacco-chewing and spitting citizens of the United States. During the sessions of congress the internal condition of the Capitol of the nation is a perpetual insult and grief to every refined American. In a single day, not only the superb Capitol, but the streets of our beautiful city, seem suddenly possessed by hordes of unkempt, dreadful looking men. The Huns of Attilla, when they swooped down from the North, did not look half so dissipated as these men do—whose greater proportion, by the way, do not swoop from the North at all, but from the South and West.

"'Who is this, with face so red,
An old slouch hat upon his head,
Who moves about with stately tread?
The "colonel."'

"'Who is this, with blood-shot eye,
Who smiling greets each passer-by,
Who walks right up and calls for rye?
The "major."'

"'Who is this, with pompous air,
Who never combs his frouzy hair,
And eats free lunch no matter where?
The "judge."'

"'Who is this, with carpet sack,
Who swings along like "Jumping Jack,"
With linen duster on his back?
The "member."'

These clever and *apropos* lines are part of a poem rewritten by one of President Arthur's secretaries, than whom no one in Washington is more likely to encounter the vast army of 'colonels,' 'majors,' 'judges' and 'members,' who every year descend upon Washington to the discomfiture of many well-bred citizens."

An editor in Chicago recently ordered a pair of trousers from the tailor. On trying them on they proved to be several inches too long. It being late on Saturday night, the tailor's shop was closed, and the editor took the trousers to his wife and asked her to cut them off and hem them over. The good lady, whose dinner had, perhaps, disagreed with her, brusquely refused. The same result followed an application to the wife's sister and the eldest daughter. But before bedtime the wife, relenting, took the pants and, cutting off six inches from the legs, hemmed them up nicely, and restored them to the closet. Half an hour later the daughter, taken with compunction for her unfilial conduct, took the trousers, and, cutting off six inches, hemmed and replaced them. Finally, the sister-in-law felt the pangs of conscience, and she, too, performed an additional surgical operation on the garment. When the editor appeared at breakfast on Sunday the family thought a Highland chieftain had arrived.—*The Century.*

Bulwer was right; there is no such word as fail; it is molified down into assignment.—*Burlington Hawkeye.*